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SUBJECT: SCENE-SETTER FOR DEPUTY SECRETARY NEGROPONTE'S
VISIT TO KABUL

Classified By: Charge Christopher Dell, for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

SUMMARY

11. (C) We welcome your first visit as Deputy Secretary to Afghanistan, which comes at an opportune time to advance our effort to establish a self-sustaining multi-channel dialogue between Afghanistan and Pakistan. The inauguration in Jalalabad of a discreet communications channel between the national security advisors offers the two neighbors their best opportunity to put aside public bickering and explore possible joint ventures to counter their common terrorist enemy. Your meeting with President Karzai will help us engage him on a focused dialogue about security, development, and governance. The last is emerging as the most critical area, one where no amount of international support can substitute for a lack of presidential leadership. Over recent months, the absence of an effective government presence in many districts has allowed the insurgency to move into new areas. Strong leadership on policing, accountable governance, corruption, and counter-narcotics would both enhance Karzai's credibility and serve as a bulwark against further insurgent gains. Your visit is an opportunity to prod him towards sustained, high-profile initiatives that can address these challenges. You will also want to reinforce our gathering concerns about Iran's activities in Afghanistan. End Summary.

Karzai's Leadership Challenge

12. (C) President Karzai benefited

politically from his successful August 5-6 Camp David visit and the August 9-12 cross border jirga with Pakistan, but he continues to face intense pressure from an increasingly assertive opposition and a resurgent insurgency. The chorus of complaint from Afghans across the country is rising and he must show he can deliver on security, particularly policing, and provide effective and accountable governance. He must balance his inclination to make concessions designed to keep his enemies inside the tent with more dynamic leadership to avoid the growing impression that he is too accommodating of warlords, drug lords, and corrupt officials. His strategy of balancing interests should not, and need not, produce a least-common-denominator government. He can fulfill his mandate to lead if he picks his battles and his allies carefully and outmaneuvers perceived power-brokers by going directly to the people.

Restructuring the Police Means Reforming the MoI

¶3. (C) The Afghan National Police is the "face of the Afghan government," and often the leading edge of the central government's strategic effort to draw insular villagers, long-abused minority groups and suspicious Pashtun tribals into a national community.

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Its root-and-branch restructuring is a major focus of the Combined Security Transition Command - Afghanistan (CSTC-A) and our Coalition partners; however, a corrupt and thoroughly dysfunctional Ministry of Interior is obscuring the progress we have achieved. Urge Karzai to announce publicly before he travels to New York his decision to move responsibility for sub-national governance out of the dysfunctional Ministry of Interior into an office in the Palace, so that he will receive plaudits rather than questions from donor nations during his overseas travel. He must abandon his practice of awarding senior police management positions as sinecures to power-brokers he wants to cultivate. Integrity and effectiveness must be the guiding principles of an entirely transparent senior ministerial appointment process. Karzai has heard these messages several times and now, at last, appears to be abandoning his reluctance to accept them. We are developing for his consideration a detailed MoI reform plan. You should assure him that the United States, the international community and, most importantly, the Afghan people will stand by him in making the tough decisions that lie ahead.

Governance: Supporting a Revitalized Afghan Social Contract

¶4. (C) Karzai knows his government is being judged on its ability to provide security, development and governance, including basic justice. Unmet expectations on all fronts are fueling opposition movements and

providing fertile ground for insurgent support in an increasing number of districts. Commend Karzai for taking a hard look at his ministries and for considering consolidation in order to gain efficiency and improve performance. Note that his decision regarding the Ministry of Interior is only a first step. He has appointed an energetic leader to the sub-governance office, but now must grant him and the governors the latitude and resources to bring effective governance to the provinces.

15. (C) We have told Karzai we want our governance programs to support his goal of strengthening the partnership between state and traditional structures at the local level. Karzai recognizes that government must be more responsive to local needs, but remains loathe to devolve authority to local officials. Encourage Karzai toward the realization that improved government performance at the local level depends on his willingness to move from a top-down command model to a partnering arrangement with his provincial governors that allows them to dispense resources to local community leaders.

Be Courageous to Stop Corruption

16. (C) Corruption threatens to undermine everything we and Karzai are trying to accomplish, and beating Afghanistan's deeply ingrained corruption is a long-term challenge. The justice system does not yet

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function at a level that would allow the arrest, conviction and incarceration of white collar criminals. Karzai has tried, albeit slowly, to remove some corrupt officials; however, the effective impunity of the powerful is demoralizing to the general public. Remind him that he needs to make a public example of the worst offenders, as he did in late 2006 and early 2007 when he consented to the removal of several police chief appointees with egregious reputations for human rights abuses and corruption. That will likely enrage powerful patrons, but courage in combating corruption will win Karzai popular support.

Counter-Narcotics: Time for Tough Decisions

17. (C) Poppy cultivation and opium trafficking are growing at alarming rates, feeding the insurgency, and undercutting development and governance efforts. The 2006/2007 poppy season saw the most comprehensive counter-narcotics activity to-date in Afghanistan, but results have been disappointing. On August 27, UNODC announced the latest poppy national cultivation figures, which will reach 193,000 hectares, up from 165,000 in 2006. The 2002 figure was 74,000 hectares.

18. (C) Karzai initially responded to the announcement by criticizing the

international community's efforts to suppress opium production. Convoluting the facts, he publicly stated that poppy cultivation was rising in provinces where the Coalition had focused its eradication efforts. Without elaborating, he said Afghan solutions would be far more effective and that his governors should stop heeding international community eradication advisors. Caution Karzai that his intemperate remarks may discourage international support and funding for opium eradication. Stress the link between poppy production and insurgency funding. Be prepared to deflect his contention that the impoverished seek opium income out of desperation: Helmand Province is wealthy by Afghan standards and has received over \$400 million in U.S. development assistance since 2002, yet was the source for almost half the world's heroin last year. Urge his full engagement in developing a public consensus between the Afghan government and the international community on a sustained, coherent approach to eradication.

Working with the Neighbors

¶9. (C) The August 9-12 Afghanistan-Pakistan Peace Jirga exceeded expectations; it began a confidence-building dialogue and identified areas where sides are willing to commit to cooperation. Afghans' perception of the diplomatic success boosted their collective self-confidence. Karzai deserves credit for following through on the commitment he made to the jirga proposal in the White House last November. Thank him for his team's success in nimbly deflecting the Pakistani delegation's efforts to

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include in the conclusions calls for the withdrawal of foreign troops and for direct talks with the Taliban. Tell him we will be working with his team as it follows up on the more practical bilateral projects proposed by the jirga. Our goals are to institutionalize this dialogue and, through your inauguration in Jalalabad of a discreet communications channel between the two national security advisors, allow the two governments a more private forum in which they can drop their posturing public antagonism and begin to coordinate their efforts to combat their common terrorist enemy.

¶10. (S) Senior Afghan officials have taken pains to impress upon us Karzai's desire to avoid a "second front" in the West, with Iran. Ahmedinejad's August 14 visit to Kabul was scripted as an opportunity for the two presidents to get to know one another and to discuss binational cooperation. Compliment the Afghan Foreign Ministry's success in resisting Iranian pressure on Karzai to sign a joint security agreement. Afghan officials privately acknowledge that, despite the visit's positive public atmospherics, they do not believe that Iran will cease its meddling, stop pressing for a security agreement, or refrain from using assistance and deportations of Afghans as

leverage on Kabul. The head of Afghanistan's National Directorate of Security privately registered with the visitors his government's worries over the appearance of Iranian weapons in Taliban inventories. Karzai understands the Iranian challenge and is privately concerned, but will resist publicly confronting Tehran. You will want to convey to him our conviction that Iran's machinations can only be countered with unambiguous firmness.

¶11. (SBU) The Afghan government and the international community launched a process in 2005 to encourage economic integration of Afghanistan with its neighbors through annual conferences. These meetings bring together regional states and donors to discuss enhanced cooperation in areas such as energy, agriculture, investment climate and trade facilitation, with the next meeting scheduled for February in Islamabad. The potential for regional economic cooperation to increase trade and reduce Afghanistan's unemployment makes it imperative that Afghanistan use this process to make headway in removing impediments to its goods transiting through Pakistan and the region. Encourage Karzai to capitalize on the good feeling engendered by the recent jirga to work with Pakistan in achieving this goal. Note the promise for enhanced trade links between Central and South Asia through the new U.S.-funded bridge linking Afghanistan and Tajikistan.

The Way Ahead

¶12. (SBU) With Camp David, the successful jirga, the carefully managed Ahmadinejad visit, and the Afghan-Tajik bridge opening, Karzai has had a good month, but a good month guarantees neither a good season nor long-term success. Karzai should use the

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momentum established this month to gain traction on the tough issues, including counter-narcotics, Ministry of Interior reform, and sub-national governance. We will continue to provide him resources and advice, but Afghanistan needs his leadership. That will require tremendous courage on his part, but your visit is one more indication of the American people's unflagging commitment to him and to Afghanistan.
DELL